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ABSTRACT

Recent corporate scandals have led to an increased community awareness and expectation for ethical behavior on the part of public school administrators, who are the CEOs of school districts and campuses. Previously, ethics has received little attention from professional organizations and even less attention in educator preparation programs. With increasing levels of accountability and complexity for school administrators, these gaps in ethics training must be addressed. A survey of 85 students currently enrolled in graduate level coursework in educational leadership was used to define the behaviors and characteristics of ethical administration. This paper presents the portrait of an ethical administrator--one who not only knows the ethical standards that are expected but also knows how to model these standards in his or her daily decisions and behaviors. The paper also offers tools, based on national standards for ethical behavior, to help administrators examine not only their own awareness and implementation of ethical standards but also that of their faculty and staff. These same tools can be used by educational leadership programs to help prepare current and aspiring administrators to apply their knowledge of ethical standards to everyday practice. Two appendices contain questionnaires for assessing perceptions of what exemplifies an ethical administrator and for assessing those characteristics in one's self. (Contains 14 references and 2 tables.) (Author/RT)

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Running Head: PORTRAIT OF AN ETHICAL ADMINISTRATOR

Portrait of an Ethical Administrator

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Abstract

Recent events in corporate scandals have led to an increased community awareness and expectation for ethical behavior on the part of public school administrators, who are the CEOs of school districts and campuses.

Previously, ethics has received little attention from professional organizations and even less attention in educator preparation programs. With increasing levels of accountability and complexity for school administrators, these gaps in ethics training must be addressed. This paper presents the portrait of an ethical administrator – one who not only knows the ethical standards that are expected but also knows how to model these standards in his or her daily decisions and behaviors. The paper also offers tools, based on national standards for ethical behavior, to help administrators examine not only their own awareness and implementation of ethical standards but also that of their faculty and staff. These same tools can be used by educational leadership programs to help prepare current and aspiring administrators to apply their knowledge of ethical standards to everyday practice.

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Portrait of an Ethical Administrator

Recent events in corporate scandals have led to an increased community awareness and expectation for ethical behavior on the part of public school administrators, who are the CEOs of school districts and campuses. As a result of the Enron scandal, a number of business schools now require ethics courses for their students; the University of Texas, for example, will require an ethics course for all business students beginning this fall (Nissimov, 2003). While not mandated by the American Association of Colleges and Schools of Business (AACSB), these courses are becoming more and more popular in current business programs. Supporters of ethics courses say that without a clear focus on ethical decision-making, these "schools do a good job of teaching the bottom line but gloss over the line between right and wrong" (Nissimov, 2003, p.1C). Arguments against ethics classes state that their effectiveness has not, and perhaps can not, be measured; however, Arthur Vargas, dean of the University of Houston's Bauer College of Business states, "Unless you're 100 percent sure ethics classes don't work, you teach them" (p.4C). These same principles now being used to train leaders in the corporate world should also apply to the preparation of leaders in education.

Administrative leaders who are ethical and able to make ethical decisions are critical to the future of education. Previously, ethics has received little attention from professional organizations and even less attention in educator preparation programs. The lack of ethical administrators in part demonstrates a shortcoming on the part of educator preparation programs, including administrator preparation programs for principals and superintendents. Few educator preparation programs incorporate any study of ethics into

the curriculum (Beck & Murphy, 1994). Those programs that do offer coursework on ethics often do so at the doctoral level, meaning that the master's degree courses most often taken by aspiring principals and superintendents offer no formal training in ethical decision-making (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

With increasing levels of accountability and complexity for school administrators, these gaps in ethics training must be addressed. Thus, the value of ethics among our school leaders is evident through other avenues as well, both on national and state levels. Ethics standards and codes have been implemented by such national associations as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration includes a unit on values in its curriculum for training principals (Thompson, 1994), and the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) devotes one of its six standards entirely to the need for building ethical leaders (Green, 2001). Likewise, many states have also implemented ethical codes and standards. Most of these codes of ethics have been in place for a number of years, yet we do not have to look far to see evidence that such standards are still not being followed by today's leaders.

Examining Student Perceptions of an Ethical Administrator

Developing educational administrators who are ethical and able to make ethical decisions is critical to the future of education. However, the definition of what constitutes an ethical administrator varies greatly. Hudson (1997) contends that "ethical virtues are reflected in the way we see ourselves as well as the way we see others, and are culminated in our relation to those others in the community in which we live" (p. 514).

Ethics have been called the disciplined study of human conduct, and such conduct has been studied by many of the greatest thinkers of modern time (Hudson, 1997). Even philosophers like Socrates and Plato were intrigued by the study of ethics. More recent definitions of ethics focus on the impact ethical leaders have on organizations and individuals. For example, ethics has been recently defined as the knowledge of what is right and wrong, as well as being able to make the correct decision between the two (Pritchett, 1999). Thus, the goal of ethics is to make decisions that are in the best interest of both the organization and the individuals that make up that organization. The inherent ambiguity of a clear definition of ethics for educational leaders can be seen by Boleman's (2001) description that ethics "is rooted in identity and faith. That's one reason that spirit and soul are at the heart of the most successful leadership" (p. 42).

Obviously an understanding of the definition of what it means to be an ethical administrator moves far beyond the textbook version of "ethics." A survey of 85 graduate students currently enrolled in master's and doctoral level coursework in educational leadership was used to define the behaviors and characteristics of ethical administrators. This open-ended survey was given to students at various levels in their educational leadership coursework. The students also represent a variety of experience levels in education, as well as a well-distributed variety of ethnic backgrounds and gender. The surveys were completed anonymously, with no student identifiable information included. Each survey asked students to describe, in their own words, the behaviors and characteristics of an ethical administrator. The results yielded an overlap in what terms students used to paint their own portrait of an ethical administrator.

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A total of 58 behaviors were listed at least one time by student respondents. The behavior that was most often cited as being indicative of an ethical administrator was being fair; 36 of the 85 students, or 35.3 percent, listed being fair as a behavior of ethical administrators. Being respectful of all persons was the next most frequently mentioned behavior, which was cited by 22 respondents, or 25.8 percent. The remaining behaviors that were cited ten or more times included being open (15 responses, 17.6 percent), being student-centered (13 responses, 15.3 percent), listening (12 responses, 14.1 percent), facilitating or assisting others (12 responses, 14.1 percent), and being a model for others (10 responses, 11.8 percent). These data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Most frequently mentioned behaviors of ethical administrators (N=85)

Behavior	Number of mentions	Percentage
Fair	30	35.3%
Respectful	22	25.8%
Open	15	17.6%
Student-centered	13	15.3%
Listens	12	14.1%
Facilitates/assists others	12	14.1%
Models	10	11.8%

The second portion of the survey asked for characteristics – as opposed to behaviors – that define ethical administrators. Sixty-three different characteristics were

mentioned by students, with a large number appearing only one time in the responses. The most commonly mentioned administrator characteristic was honesty (37 responses, 43.5 percent). Clearly this characteristic was mentioned far more often than any other characteristic or behavior, indicating how strongly students felt about this trait. Being positive and being caring or considerate were mentioned 27 times, or in 31.8 percent of the responses.

Table 2. Most frequently mentioned characteristics of ethical administrators (N=85)

Characteristic	Number of mentions	Percentage
Honest	37	43.5%
Positive	27	31.8%
Caring/considerate	27	31.8%
Fair	26	30.6%
Professional/knowledgeable	21	24.7%
Trustworthy/reliable	20	23.5%
Consistent	20	23.5%
Respectful	17	18.8%
Open-minded	16	17.6%
Kind/friendly	15	17.6%
Listener	14	16.5%
High expectations/standards	13	15.3%
Accessible/available	11	12.9%

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Fairness was mentioned 26 times and comprised 30.6 percent of the total responses; it is interesting to note that in addition to being an important characteristic of ethical administrators, fairness was also listed as the most frequently occurring behavior of these persons. Being professional and/or knowledgeable, being trustworthy and/or reliable, and being consistent were also frequently mentioned as important characteristics of ethical administrators. The findings for this question are shown in Table 2.

With these student-described behaviors and characteristics, perhaps what is needed is the portrait of an ethical administrator – one who not only knows the ethical standards that are expected but also knows how to model these standards in his or her daily decisions and behaviors. Consequently, the following tools are offered, based on national standards for ethical behavior, to help administrators examine not only their own awareness and implementation of ethical standards but also that of their faculty and staff. These same tools can be used by educational leadership programs to help prepare current and aspiring administrators to apply their knowledge of ethical standards to everyday practice.

Tools for Examining the Portrait of an Ethical Administrator

On the following pages are two tools an administrator (or an administrator preparation program) can use to examine ethical behavior. The first instrument, Portrait of an Ethical Administrator (Appendix A), is a survey that examines administrators' ethical behaviors as they relate to (1) faculty and staff, (2) students, (3) community members and parents, (4) communication, and (5) general characteristics. This tool can be used to compare staff perceptions with administrator perceptions of what behaviors are valued with respect to ethical behavior. Administrators should assess their own

perceptions, then assess the perceptions of their faculty and staff. Analysis of any discrepancies among the results can be used to facilitate understanding, communication, and rapport between administrators and their staff members.

Another tool, Self-check for Ethical Behavior (Appendix B), is designed for the administrator to use to self-assess his or her own behaviors. This tool may also be used to build awareness of ethical standards and as a dialogue for discussion about what is ethical in school administration and what is not. These short questions can easily be developed into case studies for use in the educational leadership classroom.

One additional tool that is helpful in developing ethical administrators is the development of a personal code of professional ethics (Czaja & Lowe, 2000). Preparation programs should certainly cover in depth the current codes of ethics governing educational leadership, whether they be from professional organizations such as AASA or whether they be dictated by state statute or code. However, having leadership students and/or practicing administrators develop their own personal code of ethics moves this understanding of ethical principles to the higher level of analysis and synthesis. As one student explained, "The exercise of writing my own personal statement of ethics helped to solidify my learner-centered values and an ethics-based leadership style."

Ethical administrators as those who are concerned less about being right and focused more on behaving responsibly (Fasching, 1997). These administrators consistently do what is most beneficial for their students and their schools, without concern for personal gains or outcomes. The importance of having an ethical

administrator, and being able to recognize this person as such, is inherent to the success of the school as a social entity:

> Society or we do not invent principles; they are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships and human organizations. They are part of the human condition, consciousness, and conscience. To the degree people recognize and live in harmony with such basic principles as fairness, equity, justice, integrity, honesty, and trust, they move toward either survival and stability on the one hand or disintegration and destruction on the other. (Covey, 1992, p. 18)

The need for ethical administrators, then, is one that simply cannot be ignored. The obligation to work towards meeting this need rests with us all.

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Appendix A

Portrait of an Ethical Administrator The following questionnaire is designed to assess faculty and staff perceptions of what behaviors and characteristics best exemplify an **ethical administrator**. *Directions: Please respond by selecting 10 items that most represent your perceptions of what an ethical administrator should possess or exhibit.*	
I think an ethical administrator…	Please place a check by only 10 items.
INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY AND STAFF	
is fair and consistent in his/her interactions with all teachers and staff	
treats all teachers and staff as professionals	
Facilitates and offers assistance to others to enhance their knowledge and skills	
Develops trust and confidence in teachers and staff	
shows respect for peers	
demonstrates high expectations and standards	
INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS	
is fair and consistent in his/her interactions with all students	
shows respect for students	
keeps students in mind as a priority	
is open to suggestions from everyone	
does not allow political pressure to negatively influence decisions	
is fair and consistent in his/her interactions with all parents and community members	
COMMUNICATION	
listens to others before speaking	
models and displays the characteristics you want to see in others	
does not talk about others or share gossip or use other people's names in discussions with other people	
effectively communicates personal values and beliefs	
effectively communicates values and beliefs of the school	
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS	
displays confidence	
is open-minded	
is honest	
is knowledgeable	
is trustworthy and reliable	
exhibits professional behavior	

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Appendix B

Self-check for Ethical Behavior

The purpose of this inventory is for the administrator to self-assess his/her own ethical behavior.

Have you ever...	YES	NO
1. given your son or daughter supplies bought with school funds?		
2. excluded a student from participating in a program because of their sex?		
3. refused to appoint someone for an honor because they filed a complaint against you?		
4. accepted the contract for a new assessment item bank from a friend who's represents a new software company?		
5. created a special assignment for a young male teacher in the summer because he needed the money for his family?		
6. knowingly let your church group use the baseball equipment one Saturday without following district policy and procedures?		
7. recorded that a student who dropped out of school was being home-schooled when you had no official documentation that this was true?		
8. over-estimated the amount you should receive for reimbursement or expenses (since you did not get reimbursed for a lost receipt last month)?		
9. offered a position to a friend even though you knew they weren't as qualified as another candidate?		
10. knowingly ran a red light on a deserted highway?		
11. not selected a person for an opportunity or a position because they were grossly overweight?		
12. misrepresented the facts regarding a student?		
13. won a $570.00 deer rifle from a Rotary Club raffle ($5.00 ticket) and did not report it to the IRS		
14. knowingly gave as student (with no authorization) an aspirin because they had a headache		
15. knowingly recorded incorrect information on a student's records?		
16. used a friend's identification card to get your child into a game or access to an activity		
17. allowed a student to consume alcohol in the presence of his uncle who was an educator?		
18. shared details about a student's record with your family?		
19. taken advantage of your position as principal to get a discount?		
20. promised a co-worker dinner if they would go along with you regarding a professional decision?		

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Did you check "yes" for any of the items in the list? Congratulations! You are in violation of at least one ethical standard and could be at risk of losing your position because you did not follow the Code of Ethics and Standards for your profession.

If you marked:	*the following ethical areas were violated:*
1, 4, 8, 9, 19	Financial Gain and Personal Benefit
6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16	Official Records and Policies
2, 14, 17, 18	Student Rights
3, 5, 11, 20	Personnel (Colleagues and Staff)

Note: Some items overlap into more than one ethical area and could be in more than one category.

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